
**“By My Heart”: Gerald Vizenor’s *Almost Ashore* and
*Bear Island: The War at Sugar Point***

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“I grew up at Little Earth (officially Little Earth of United Tribes). Aki- earth, Akiins- Little Earth. I don't know how many relocation programs were geared toward Mpls. Seems too close to home for it to be an effective site. That's probably what drew many Anishinaabe to that city. I still tell people I'm from Akiins [because] I think it would be dishonest or deceptive to say that I'm from Waswaaganing (Lac du Flambeau) or Bwaan Akiing (Enemy Territory, Marty, SD), I only stayed at those places for weeks or months during the year. So to be totally clear I always say I'm from Little Earth and my parents are from... If they want clarity I explain. I know there are problems that go with saying you are not from a particular rez but I think a bigger problem is portraying myself as if I have intimate knowledge of a place where I haven't lived. The way I see nationhood you have to have a homeland. For this to happen in the city, Anishinaabe must claim the city as their territory. This is a little of why I claim it as where I'm from....

*Gigawaabamin Miinawa,
Ben”*

The quotation above derives from an email my friend and scholar Ben Burgess sent to me a few years ago, and I include it here as it has prompted some questions I have had in recent years toward Native literary nationalism, Indigenous transnationalisms, and claiming homelands. Ben and I both graduated from UC Davis’s PhD program in Native American Studies, and we are both born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, though because of our scholarly/creative professions and our family obligations, neither of us resides there currently. We both go back and visit often, however, as our extended families still live in the Twin Cities. It is within this setting that our conversation about how we view home (Minneapolis) and what that place means more broadly for Anishinaabe peoples began and continues. Ben has helped me think more critically about how Anishinaabe people unsettle and complicate urban and off-reservation life through various ways and practices, whether through ceremony, physical activity, creative

expression, or alliance building. And I want to cite his wisdom and honor his words here before I continue.

How do we who are invested in Native peoples and their communities, as well as those working from Native American Studies frameworks, critically access and assess Indigenous definitions of nation, sovereignty, and citizenship, when those definitions are actively determined and granted nuance by Indigenous peoples themselves in ways contrary to colonial and even tribal definitions—by Indigenous peoples, as Burgess suggests, who think critically and creatively about “connection to place?”¹ Two recent collections of poetry by the ever-prolific Gerald Vizenor, *Almost Ashore* and *Bear Island* (both published in 2006), illuminate these sets of questions about Anishinaabe nationhood, but perhaps not in the way American Indian literary nationalists or even Anishinaabe Studies theorists might imagine. Through the creative medium of poetry, Vizenor reveals de-territorialized concepts of tribal identity and, at the same time, the continuance and resilience of a sovereign nation firmly located in Anishinaabe homelands. Though this creative exploration of an at-once rooted *and* destabilized citizenship could be viewed as a contradictory framework, Vizenor’s poetry anchors this paradox in a particular landscape, set of stories, relationships, and memories, which ultimately demonstrates Anishinaabe peoples defining their own sense of transnational mobility and their own relationships to their nation.

In short, what I argue ahead is that Vizenor’s poetry offers a blueprint for Anishinaabe definitions of nation and citizenship marked *not* by states’ attempts to regulate movement of people across borders, but rather by the people themselves determining the locales and ideals of the nation. Vizenor’s poetry specifically evokes this through the term “by my heart” in his epic poem *Bear Island: The War at Sugar Point* and then extending the concept, albeit in less explicit terms, in his poems in *Almost Ashore*. Read in translation from the Anishinaabe word *bagwana*, “by my heart” shapes the integrity of Anishinaabe storytelling as historical narrative and political mapping through geographical and relational rather than temporal means. By examining his epic work *Bear Island* as well as three poems from *Almost Ashore* (a trio I call his “Minneapolis poems”—“Family Portrait,” “Guthrie Theater,” and “Raising the Flag”), I suggest that Vizenor’s poetry depicts Anishinaabeg self-determining their realities and

their definitions of their nation, even in the midst of horror. The poems reveal Anishinaabe defiance, subversion, and valor in the face of those who would act to ignore, minimize, and stamp out a people's autonomy.

“By My Heart” as Anishinaabe GPS

Vizenor first presents the phrase, “by my heart,” in the Introduction to *Bear Island* as the transcription of Bagwana or Bugaunak, a Pillager warrior, and translates it as “at random, by chance, anyhow, and by heart” (6). Vizenor, in the epic poem that follows, evokes this phrase throughout many of the lines of the lyric. I use Vizenor's phrase as a meaningful poetic marker that provides definitions of the political and social constructions of Anishinaabe nationhood and citizenship at the same time it gestures toward what it means to be a member of or have a connection to a heart-center that has no colonial or tribal boundaries, no matter where that member resides. Although Anishinaabe language speakers will read and understand *bagwana* as “by random chance,” and that definition suggests a particular way to unpack the lines of poetry, it is crucial to remember that Vizenor writes in English, for the most part, and that the phrase “by my heart”—while it is Vizenor's translation of *bagwana*—also exists in lines of poetry in English. Thus, I argue that my cooptation of the phrase “by my heart” as a critical lens suggests two ways of understanding Anishinaabe citizenship, nationhood, and connection to place. First, it alludes to poetry by heart, as in the memorized or memory-based language one carries with oneself—language as a determining factor of a sovereign body of people. From this, “by my heart” signals a heart-center that supplants colonial and tribal mappings of territory with storied and peopled “mappings” of territory. Second, the phrase points to a transliteration of stories through poetry. *Bagwana* uttered in story and in conversation, captured on paper, and finally translated into English signals Vizenor's notion of chance, or narrative chance, in which ambiguity and nuance (playfulness) replace the logic of cause and effect and the “traumatizing, monolithic ‘terminal creeds’ perpetuated by social science discourses” (Madsen 69), narratives that embrace irony over predetermined courses of demise. “By my heart,” then, communicates the aliveness of Anishinaabe peoples, the active presence of a nation, and

not the tragic, flatness of *indians* within the narrative of Euro-American progressivist history.

Sugar Point (where the battle takes place near Bear Island on Leech Lake on the Leech Lake Reservation in Northern Minnesota) and Minneapolis, Minnesota,² are two locations where Vizenor’s poetry illustrates Anishinaabe nationhood with bounded social and cultural actors who at the same time create physical, spiritual, and philosophical connections that extend beyond both colonial and Indigenous borders. Understanding these transnational practices of the Anishinaabe through Vizenor’s creative writing is to understand poetry as a meeting place of sorts, a mechanism that resists narratives that taxonomize Native histories and realities and pushes against the limits of equation that enclose Native peoples one dimensionally and fix discourses of domination; as such, Vizenor presents Anishinaabeg functioning in self-determining ways—not as inevitably globalized peoples or nations, or those with “multicultural” identities, but sovereign Anishinaabe peoples who, by their heart, control and bolster Native presence across lands, borders, states, and lines.

Bear Island Traces

In the introduction to his lyric history, Vizenor indicates some of his motivation for wanting to write such a poem:

Sugar Point is a trace of creation and the modern site of a war enacted by the United States Army in 1898. The Anishinaabe had resisted the arrogant and capricious federal marshals and then routed, by imagination, natural reason, stealth, and strategy, the imperious officers and immigrant soldiers from the Leech Lake Reservation. The defeat is seldom mentioned in military histories. (4) Galvanized by Hole in the Day, the Pillager warriors resist the Third Infantry on October 5, 1898 in the War at Sugar Point, and decidedly win the battle. For the Pillagers, it marked vehement opposition to “federal policies that spurned their Native rights and eroded their sacred land” (10). While the defeat itself is “seldom mentioned in military histories” (10) and in many ways underscores a fierce Anishinaabe nationalism located in the heart of the Leech Lake Reservation—a nation advancing self-determination as it decried flooded rice beds and degraded grave sites as well as illegal timber harvesting—

the defeat also demonstrates the transnational sites of presence for the Anishinaabe in interesting ways. For instance, Vizenor's foregrounding of Anishinaabe diplomacy, military moves, and cosmopolitan sensibilities as well as his echoing the legacy of Anishinaabe resistance and resisters throughout the text underscores his insistence on the international pursuits and transnational "boundedness" of the Anishinaabe. Guarzino and Smith assert in "The Locations of Transnationalism" that "the actual mooring and, thus, boundedness of transnationalism by the opportunities and constraints found in particular localities where transnational practices occur" resonates with the colonial experience of Indigenous peoples in North America, and specifically with mid-19th century (and beyond) realities of Anishinaabe peoples (12).

In his *Introduction* to the poem, Vizenor foregrounds Anishinaabe movement across the continent, and the spiritual presence with which that migration continued to occur—from their eastern migration from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Superior following the *miigis* to the Grand Medicine Society's permeations in Anishinaabe cultural philosophy and day-to-day life. Vizenor is also purposeful in chronicling the line of Anishinaabe spiritual and military leaders, from Chief Flat Mouth to Keeshkemun to Black Dog to Bugaunak to Hole in the Day. Taken altogether, this provides a legacy of resistance that spans Anishinaabe history and provides a map of Indigenous experience. Anishinaabe create translocal and transnational practices and relations that provide both "opportunities and constraints" within those systems. Vizenor depicts national alliances rooted not in bordered nation-states but in migrations of many kinds, from the Midewewin spiritual practices to the journeying of the *miigis* shell.

Anishinaabe points of origin appear through various locales and, in Vizenor's narrative, as necessarily preceding particular accounts of Anishinaabe nation-building. In this manner, the *Introduction* frames the entire epic so that the Pillager military victory is neither isolated nor accidental, but a sign of the enduring global designs and transnational practices of the Anishinaabe nation. Migration, then, is not linear, progressivist action as much as it is relational, widening movement: "The Anishinaabe envisioned their associations with the earth by natural reason...an imagic sense of presence in the time and seasons of the woodland lakes" (3), says Vizenor in the *Introduction*. Scott Lyons in *X-Marks* notes how migration is fundamental to the Anishinaabe: "If anything can be

considered an enduring value for Ojibwe people, it has got to be migration [starting with] the legend of the Great Migration passed down through the oral tradition...” (3). In *Bawaajimo*, Margaret Noodin echoes Lyons’ emphasis on migration. Drawing first on Roger Roulette’s assertion countering the idea that indigenous peoples were ‘nomadic,’ Noodin ties that to the Anishinaabe concept of *nametwaawaa*:

Long ago the Anishinaabeg moved around and left a presence while transporting things; they traveled for three to five years at a time and always kept in mind the places they had been (interview).

This practice of *nametwaawaa*, which is the verb that can describe a relationship with a place, not random wandering, but enlightened stewardship that allowed people to circle a vast homeland, learning when to be where. Many stories speak of places visited in dreams or visions, places like the sky or a cave at the bottom of the lake, or the kitchen table of *nokomisba*, who is no longer living. This ability to visit elsewhere, perhaps stepping out of time, is part of many Anishinaabe stories and can be found in the writing of contemporary Anishinaabe authors as frequently as the lakes and forests” (37).³

Vizenor’s poem, then, excises the War at Sugar Point from dominant discourses, the terminal creeds that lock and flatten Indian people as non-agents, by creating a narrative that circles and widens by “natural reason” and is concerned with “the provenance of story” (36).

The poem’s prelude, “Overture: Manidoo Creations,” forecasts the battle only after it moors the Anishinaabe as “natives of the miigis”; descendents of the “crafty trickster / naanabozho / created natives / bear and cranes / muskrats”; and, beneficiaries of “manidoo creation / blood totems / bear covenants / of native survivance” (13-14), as if to say the initiative of history writing in this narrative is located in and grows out of Indigenous sensibilities to what constitutes nationhood for the Anishinaabe and how their “boundaries” are etched out. “Bagwana: The Pillagers of Liberty,” which is the first of five movements in the lyric poem, establishes the Pillager clan as the ancestral antecedent of the line of warrior Anishinaabeg, illuminating for the reader a current of resistance which seems to have always been moving in and beyond Anishinaabe physical and cultural territoriality. The Bagwana portion of the narrative sets a foundation to

conceptualize the War at Sugar Point because through it the reader understands more deeply this inheritance that Hole in the Day calls upon. Early in this first section, Vizenor offers a prelude to the battle:

six soldiers dead
bones cracked
muscles torn
bloody wounds
by winchesters
over the turnips
cabbage and potatoes
in a ragged garden
cultivated near shore
by bugonaygeshig
hole in the day
midewiwin healer
and elusive pillager (20).

Quickly, Vizenor connects this narrative to one of its cultural precursors:

solitary spirits
marvelous sentiments
of shamans
court and tradition
under the cedar
set by names
ravens and bears
visual memories
traces of bagwana
turned in translation
by my heart
a native warrior
and natural presence
at the tree line (20-21).

Vizenor relays to his reader that Bagwana and fourteen other Anishinaabe warriors, led by Black Dog, seek vengeance on some “Dakota riders” for killing a Pillager child. Bagwana is the only warrior to “survive the war” and “by my heart / returned a shaman / silent and alone / to bear island” (23). Throughout the narrative, there is a visual and philosophical conflation of the warrior and the shaman, vengeance and spirituality, with Anishinaabe leadership pushing against colonial acts. What sets the stage for narrating Hole in the Day and the War at Sugar Point, then, is not only the “greedy factors / caught in the dirty / mirrors of civilization,” the “frontier justice / contrived by grafters” (29), and Christianity’s role in “manifest manners” and acts of genocide, but also the visionary leaders “forever honored / by the anishinaabe” (28).

It is through this frame, then, the reader comes to follow the story of Bear Island. Vizenor repeats “by my heart” fifteen times throughout the poem, each time indicating a unifying citizenship of the descendants of “native liberty,” inheritors bequeathed a shared story of experience that characterizes their sense of nation as eternally “natural reason / anishinaabe survivance” (46). And because Vizenor so closely links Hole in the Day and other Anishinaabe leaders to the Mide and Anishinaabe religion, the concept of citizenship, which reveals the ideals of Anishinaabe nationhood, shifts the reader’s perception of historical renderings and readings of war and colonial oppression. In the section “Bearwalkers: 5 October, 1898,” Vizenor says,

nineteen natives
 bear island warriors
 shrouded at home
 in the brush
 under the maples
 winchesters ready
 to scare and menace
 untried soldiers
 back to the steamer
 and recover
 the pleasures
 of native stories

and medicine dances
 by my heart
 and hole in the day
 alight as birds (61).

“By my heart” echoes throughout the poem, each time preceded or followed by an Anishinaabe presence, whether Hole in the Day, Bagwana, Keeshkemun, Chief Flat mouth, Pillager warriors, bear clan, an “elusive raven,” “trace of native shamans” or “manidoo bounty” (73, 25), as the phrase in many ways implies a legacy of resistance and warriors, and signals Anishinaabe culture and homelands. As such, it is the genealogies of Anishinaabe stories and histories that transform national alliances, transgress borders, and re-order western understandings of militarization. And the phrase “by my heart” communicates that shifting because of its associations to extant peoples.

This complicated reorientation of how to perceive and understand Indigenous historiography, nation-building, and global presence is precisely the work in which Vizenor’s poetry is engaged. *Bear Island* reveals Anishinaabeg mapping out the territory of their nation by rendering not a place compromised by its federal trust status but a place defended by five totemic alliances and specifically the leaders of the Makwa clan (bear, the warriors) and the Ajijaak clan (crane, the orators). Whether through militancy or diplomacy, Vizenor illustrates the Anishinaabe as envoys crossing colonial borders to defend their lifeways. For example, in “Gatling Gun: 6 October 1898” Vizenor says,

chief white cloud
 waubanaquot
 anishinaabe ogimaa
 white earth reservation
 a native patriot
 of natural reason
 died at the agency
 on his way
 to mediate peace
 with the army
 pillager warriors

and federal agents (81).

Here, in the middle of narrating the battle, Vizenor insists on telling the stories of Anishinaabe leaders, their diplomatic pursuits, transnational moves and cosmopolitan interests. Using the term “native patriot,” Vizenor shifts the reader’s perception of “national allegiance” and common understandings of “U.S. history,” as he reveals Anishinaabe leaders demonstrating their mediatory intentions.

Anishinaabe military procedures, too, are cast in stark contrast to historical meta-narratives of United States military might and progress.

the native warrior
 who fired the shot
 was only fifteen
 the pillager son
 of hole in the day
 he waited
 with his Winchester
 at the tree line
 in the dark maples
 for a wild soldier
 and fired once
 to forewarn
 the military poachers
 the second round
 was the last and deadly
 shot of the war
 that cold morning at sugar point (80).

Native survivance depends on a “native mercy shot” which the white soldier survives (79); it is only after the soldier continues to rummage through Hole in the Day’s garden looking for sustenance that the Pillager son fires a second fatal bullet. Vizenor narrates the war in a way that scrutinizes the colonial tendency to sanctify manifest destiny and the conqueror’s military might. In addition to the scene with the “native mercy shot,” Vizenor ends the epic poem with the section “War Necklace: 9 October 1898,” in which

the master narrative of U.S. history based on “cultural conceit” and “constitutional trickery” is turned on its head (93). Vizenor provides a final litany of dead white soldiers subverting western ways of remembrance of valor, making real and very ugly the realities of war. He foregrounds the litany, however, with Hole in the Day’s continuance as an “undaunted warrior” (85), able to peacefully attend to his garden once again and his practices as a Mide member: he fashions “a memorial / war necklace / native survivance / remembrance / a defeated army / overcome by winchesters / and fierce irony” (86). The litany of U.S. soldiers, then, reads not as a legacy of U.S. military prowess, but as fierce commentary on a “treacherous / emissary war” and its “cruel renunciation / of native reason / treaty rights / and continental liberty” (93). By the end, the poem has provided a narrative that works to show the Anishinaabeg working transnationally—across clan, tribe, and colonial lines—and engaging a level of indigeneity not as an evanescent phenomena but as consistent philosophical and political design.

In this way, the War at Sugar Point does not signify the closing of the frontier or the last chapter for Native Americans, as mainstream U.S. history would have it, but instead it marks a turning point, albeit a complicated one, for the Anishinaabe. Similarly, Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems from *Almost Ashore*, as I argue ahead, mark defining moments in recent Indigenous history.

Minneapolis: the 8th Rez⁴

The urban (off-reservation) realities of the latter half of the 20th century, like the contentious realities for the Anishinaabe at the turn of the 20th century in *Bear Island*, demonstrate the resilient nation-building efforts of threatened and dislocated peoples. Writing about these historical experiences, Vizenor exposes just how insufficient the colonial construction of the city/reservation dichotomy is to understand Native American nationhood or to unlock the bindings of colonially imposed definitions of citizenship. In *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*, Renya Ramirez aptly asserts that the “traditional-community/reservation-member” versus the “modern-urbanite” not only lacks paradigmatic utility, but it is also constructed in part as a tool for continued colonial attack, a means to diffuse Native cultures. Further, in his essay “The Urban Tradition among Americans,” Jack Forbes stresses that “what many

non-native writers do not realize is that the First Americans have, in fact, gone through periods of deurbanization and reurbanization on various occasions in their history and that urban life has been a major aspect of American life from ancient times” (5).

Indigenous alliance building is something Native peoples practiced before Europeans ever arrived in the Americas (made evident in mounds, earthworks, architecture etc.); indeed, Anishinaabe nation-building is also an age-old practice, which included ways by which the Anishinaabe differentiated themselves between clans, other tribes like the Dakota, and early European groups, like the French and Norwegians. Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems reveal various types of what I have elsewhere called *dislocations*⁵, which Native peoples have continually experienced as they evoke the idea of “by my heart” as a means to express unique forms of continuance and connection despite urbanity, destabilized citizenship, and military action.

To be sure, this construction of the transnational is not one formed by postcolonial concepts of “the center and its margins” or by the experience of the quintessential unbounded transnational migrant, but rather one that takes very seriously something Robert Warrior asserted nearly five years ago in relationship to the growth of Indigenous studies: the “mere invocation of the transnational is not enough. As an analytical category, transnationalism is, to put it mildly, all over the place” (120). Instead he argues that, “In effect, our [Native] nationalism is born out of native transnationalism, the flow and exchange of ideas and politics across our respective nations’ borders” (125). Vizenor’s poems impart a framework that is flexible and nuanced enough to recognize the perviousness of nation-state and tribal borders, the complication of nationalist alliances, and the observance of Anishinaabe people as actively determining their “place” in North America and in the world, wherever they might be.

Indeed, modern definitions of the citizen and the state as shaped by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and similar and ongoing iterations of international relations⁶ thoroughly complicate and vex contemporary tribal notions of sovereignty, nationhood, and citizenship—as the collision suggests a particular dialectic of an official national narrative that creates static and secure boundaries around the nation-state. I believe the Minneapolis poems prompt a critical study of these types of normalizing dialectic constructions and dominant discourses, ultimately demonstrating what Scott Lyons in *X-*

Marks sees as “discursive formations, or ways of speaking that are traceable to institutions, the state, and dominant cultural understandings, and always associated with power and hierarchies” (23-24). In fact, if one takes Shelley Fisher Fishkin's idea of “interrogat[ing] “the ‘naturalness’ of some of the borders, boundaries, and binaries” that have accounted for the “multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods” as a working definition of transnational studies (22), then the Anishinaabe experience as expressed in Vizenor’s poetry can be more affectively framed as a transnational project, albeit a necessarily Anishinaabe one.

“Family Photograph”

In her essay “Picture Revolution: Transnationalism, American Studies, and the Politics of Contemporary Native Culture, Shari Huhndorf asserts that “Native Americans present the most radical challenges to U.S. nationalist myths and imperial practices...Contained by neither place nor time, this on-going process [of colonization] cannot be marginalized; instead it implicates all nonindigenous peoples in conquest” (368). While the storied inheritance of colonialism as experienced in the Americas incorporates all peoples—colonists and Indigenous peoples alike, the process of colonization cannot be limited to a particular location or era for Native peoples in general; notwithstanding, individual Indigenous families and communities certainly have specific narratives of colonial impact and conquest that add to the legacy of Native peoples’ struggle and resistance. Stories are vehicles for capturing or mirroring that on-going process because of the ability language holds to move beyond the dichotomies that structure the colonial experience (e.g. conquered vs. conqueror, outsider vs. insider, reservation-based vs. urban-based, traditional vs. assimilated). For instance, in “Family Photograph,” Vizenor portrays the legacy of colonial impact on a young man and his family departing from the reservation toward life in the city:

my father
turned away
from white earth
the reservation
colonial genealogies

and moved to the city
with family
at twenty three (lines 10-17).

Here, a White Earth community member (who we understand as Vizenor’s father) chooses to move his family to the city of Minneapolis; up to this point, a colonial context frames the spaces of the reservation and the urban locale within the poem. A racialized space, the city is portrayed with forgotten and overlooked individuals. For instance, Vizenor’s father and other Indigenous city “immigrant[s]” are “deserted twice” and “by combat / and crusades / thrown back / forever / to evangelists / and charity” (74, 36, 48-53). Despite this, Clement Vizenor’s story does not end with obscurity or isolation (though we know from Vizenor’s autobiography Clement is mysteriously murdered); rather, Vizenor enlivens his father’s figure in specific Anishinaabe ways: “native tricksters / teased his memory / shared dreams / and chance” (28-31), in which Anishinaabe culture is actively represented “by my heart.” More than planting Indigenous cues in the Minneapolis setting, Vizenor’s poem reveals through the figure of his father an active Anishinaabe territory, a place of Native “immigrant” diaspora, positioning a generation of Anishinaabeg not as “removed” peoples but as those “deliver[ing] / the first / white earth / native stories / in the suburbs” (81-85). In other words, through the poem, Vizenor reveals how the Anishinaabe determined and continue to station themselves in places not delineated by colonial boundaries but by Indigenous notions of mapping.

Understandably, in her essay “Picture Revolution,” Huhndorf points toward the challenge Native texts pose as they assert the “national and transnational dimensions of Indigenous politics” (369), and she leans on J.B. Harley in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* to assert Native communities’ vexed relationship to the nation-state through the role cartography continues to play in notions of empire:

‘[M]aps have been the weapons of imperialism’: not only are they essential for claiming, settling, and exploiting land; they also establish boundaries for the ‘containment of subject populations’ and ‘create myths [to] assist in the maintenance of the territorial status quo.’ As graphic renderings of Europe’s conquests, maps remain, Harley concludes, ‘preeminently a language of power, not protest.’ (Huhndorf, 359)

Unlike western cartography, however, Indigenous mappings of place render far more dimension. According to Mark Warhus in *Another America*, “maps were not created as permanent documents in Native American traditions. The features of geography were part of a much larger interconnected mental map that existed in oral traditions...Native American maps were pictures of experience” (3).⁷ “Family Photograph” illustrates an Indigenous way of reading and framing the city by poetically recording human experience in relationship to a place, a landscape the Anishinaabe have always known through stories, trade routes, seasonal migrations, and intertribal relationships. In fact, the poem helps reveal how nationhood for Indigenous people was and is supported by transnational tribal formations. What links Anishinaabe people is not the geo-political spaces mapped by colonial boundaries, but the cultural and spiritual foundations that give rise to a peoplehood and that challenge the many standard dichotomies colonial narratives have produced.

Still, for Clement Vizenor, Minneapolis becomes a place of poverty and “racial shame” (71). The poem, however, seems to erupt from these creases of despair, enlivening the landscape of Anishinaabe lifeways via transnational Indigenous connections:

native stories
masterly
during the great
depression
inspired survivance
in unheated
cold water rooms
stained by kerosene
city blisters
memories in exile
and the fate
of families
burst overnight (91-103).

In Vizenor’s *Almost Ashore*, Minneapolis is understood not as an Indigenous space constructed as a result of Relocation legislation of the 1950’s, but as a “nationalized” homeland of the Anishinaabe—a heart-center, thereby suggesting the transnational identities of Anishinaabe people. In this poem, Minneapolis becomes a location transformed by Anishinaabe people because of relocation, but it is also a place recuperated by the Anishinaabeg as traditional homelands. In each way, Anishinaabe life ways are marked by bold political moves and acts of resistance. Though Clement Vizenor ultimately “lost at cards” (116) (and, again, we know from Vizenor’s autobiographies that Clement dies in obscurity), the figure in the poem just as compellingly persists as an active presence, an agent of Anishinaabe culture, perpetuating stories, bloodlines, and defiance toward “colonial genealogies” (14). This active presence evokes the poetic marker “by my heart” in the ways the poem unflattens the colonial terminal creeds of relocation.

“*Guthrie Theater*”

In the second of Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems, Vizenor uses the site of the famed Guthrie Theater in downtown Minneapolis and the image of the theater more generally to expose the playing of *indian* in stark contrast to an Indigenous homeless veteran outside of the Minneapolis institution. While school children file into the building, american Indian / ... limps past / the new theater // wounded indian / comes to attention / on a plastic leg / and delivers / a smart salute // with the wrong hand” (lines 1, 11-18). This image of the veteran saluting with “the wrong hand” recurs at the end of the poem as well and signals the *indian*’s subversion to colonial depictions of the fallen Native, despite the U.S. government’s utter betrayal of Native people, especially toward veterans of war. Once again like in *Bear Island*, empty promises echo the recurring “treaties [broken]” and disillusioned populations of Native people illustrated by “forsaken warriors / [who] retire overnight / in cardboard suites / under the interstates” (52, 42-45).

While in Vizenor’s poem the theatrics of posing come from the actors within the theater in the form of the ultimate romanticization and fetishization of the *indian* simulation (the rehearsing of Wounded Knee as “night after night / the actors / new posers / mount and ride / on perfect ponies / out to the wild / cultural westerns / hilly

suburbs / with buffalo bill” [54-61]), the Anishinaabe veteran “salutes the actors / with the wrong hand” (49-50), suggesting perhaps his disoriented state but also, and more powerfully, his politics of subversion and his defiance in the face of being disregarded. Here, outside of the Guthrie, a space lauded for ingenuity and creativity, it is the homeless veteran that makes transparent the on-going colonial legacies of playing *indian* and non-Indigenous people’s investment in and perpetuation of that role.

In fact, through this poem readers are reminded how Indigenous peoples have continually remade urban spaces as sites of resistance and invention. Renya Ramirez says in her essay “Healing through Grief: Urban Indians Reimagining Culture and Community” that urban areas exist as Indigenous “hubs,” information centers “where Indians from all the different tribes can share and then send this information back home” (259). Cities exist as Native cultural, communal, and imaginative hubs that “challenge acculturation theory” and foil dichotomous means of registering Native life as either “traditional” (reservation-based) or “modern” (urban-based). Therefore, cities as Indigenous hubs where ideas and life ways ebb and flow, continue and adapt, thrive and evolve can “strengthen Indian peoples’ collective voice and ability to mobilize for social change” (259). Thus, in “Guthrie Theater,” Vizenor is able to assert “culture wars / wound the heart / and dishonor / the uniform” because the Anishinaabe veteran’s strength and rebellion stand in stark contrast to the colonial imaginings of the forgotten *indian* under the highway or simulated *indian* on the theater’s stage (38-41). As in “Family Photograph,” the urban space of Minneapolis in “Guthrie Theater” is marked as Anishinaabe territory on an Indigenous map of experience, a transnational space that—like any Ojibwe homeland—fosters social forces for change and anchors the Anishinaabeg in powerful moments of adaptability. The urban warrior with incredible military intelligence is in this poem a dimensional human being, one whom Lyons may cite as making a “signature of assent” against “discursive formations” of dominance (24).

“Raising the Flag”

Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith assert in their introduction “The Locations of Transnationalism” to *Transnationalism from Below* assert

Transnational practices do not take place in an imaginary ‘third space’ abstractly located ‘in between’ national territories. Thus, the image of transnational migrants as deterritorialized, free-floating people represented by the now popular academic adage ‘neither here nor there’ deserves closer scrutiny. Intermittent spatial mobility, dense social ties, and intense exchanges fostered by transmigrants across national borders have...fed the formulation of metaphors of transnationalism as a boundless and therefore liberatory process. However, transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times (11).

While these scholars present a scope of analysis that leaves out Indigenous notions of transnational practices as it relates to the geo-political realities of Native American and First Nation tribes under the auspices of the U.S. and Canadian governments, their assertions still formulate helpful connections to the ways in which Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems express Indigenous transnational experience; as such, Anishinaabe people (on the U.S. side of the nation-state border in this case) create autonomous spaces in which the U.S. government has limited access and control. If we are to read the transnational turn into narratives of Native resistance, we realize a context that signifies intertribal experience less as a result of colonial dominance or oppressive policy making and more as a comment on the global designs of Indigenous groups. In fact, Huhndorf makes note of these broader designs when she says, “indigenous transnationalism arises from connections that supersede and contest colonial national boundaries.” (369).

What this means is that other mechanisms for recognizing, recording, and experiencing nationhood exist. Walter Mignolo in *Local Histories / Global Designs* asserts that the nation-state runs on hegemony and the “coloniality of power” over its citizens (16), works toward the imperial deployment and naturalization of mono(theistic) culture while still publically delivering the rhetoric of multiculturalism (229), and invests its interests in guarding and militarizing its borders. On the other hand, Indigenous notions of the nation (as we understand them through Vizenor’s writing) grow out of the landscape-based (“earthed”) and storied origins, genealogies of “manidoo creations,” “blood totems,” and “natural presence” (lines from *Bear Island*), the pre-subaltern

context of which Mignolo defines as a diverse, plurilogical, and pluritopical set of temporalities “that moves in all possible directions” from its local history and epistemology outward (202). Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems, moreover, narrate nationhood in Anishinaabe-specific ways, in ways in which narrative chance denaturalizes colonial definitions.

Within this framework, Vizenor’s “Raising the Flag” depicts a “Native urban experience” in which a woman once held in esteem by her community now finds herself alone and poor in Minneapolis’s “Indian” neighborhood:

native woman
 once a healer
 by a thousand years
 anishinaabe time
 shivered alone
 in a telephone booth
 at the corner
 of tenth and chicago
 in minneapolis (lines 1-9)

Vizenor’s poem continues from there to signal recognizable U.S./Native federal policies and practices that accompanied Relocation, such as generations of Native people as recipients of “federal school[ing],” being “outed” to white farmers, being subject to “federal agents,” “separation / and cultural / dominance,” “charity shoes,” and racial defamation (13, 16, 21, 26-28, 33). But Vizenor unfastens these supposed tightened effects of conquest by centering the heart of Anishinaabe people in revealing the women’s defiance, valor, and sense of continuance:

she was down
 with a sacred name
 alone forever
 in a telephone booth
 unbearable marks
 of civilization
 waiting to hear

the voices
 of her children
 stolen by welfare
 security agents (55-65)

The poem turns here (literally with the word “turned”) to soothe the pain of and heal from the “marks of civilization:”

she turned
 at the winter bar
 raised a flag
 of eagle feathers
 and honored
 by song
 hole in the day
 pillager warriors
 at bear island
 and sugar point (66-75)

The flag in the title evokes the U.S. flag, and thus a certain type of loyalty, but by the last stanza one understands an Anishinaabe sense of nationalism, which anchors a transnational Anishinaabe politic, marked by an allegiance to a “flag / of eagle feathers” and to traditional ways; and in this moment, the reader recognizes her fierce and resistant ancestors who champion her valor, as the woman in the poem recognizes and recalls her traditional (and ongoing) honoring practices. In “Raising the Flag,” Vizenor characterizes her as heart-filled, good-hearted, and led “by her heart”: Though alone, she searches for ways to connect with her children “stolen by welfare agents”; though separated from her community and her traditional ways and language, she attempts connection with phone calls; though freezing and starving, she perseveres with her “patent red / charity shoes” and “check[s] twice / the coin return” (32-33, 38-39); and finally, though “teased,” “cursed,” “mauled”, and defamed (44, 49, 52), she honors and calls for strength from a legacy that she as an Anishinaabe women has inherited, a legacy, specifically, from the powerful and diplomatic Ojibwe leader, Hole in the Day.⁸ And she is emboldened by memories, which store and register Anishinaabe people not as broken and downtrodden,

but as powerful bands of people that have resisted and continue to resist colonial forces. Finally, the figure in “Raising the Flag” illustrates the undoing of homogeneous nationalities as she delineates a kind of autonomous Anishinaabe territory that also includes non-Anishinaabe peoples.

Indeed, all three of Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems, “Family Photograph,” “Guthrie Theater,” and “Raising the Flag,” narrate moments of resistance that echo the Pillagers at Sugar Point. Each figure in Vizenor’s poems from *Almost Ashore* ultimately defends a nationalism, a territory (Minneapolis, or *Gakaabikaang* in Ojibwemowin) because of his/her Indigenous understandings of land and movement, defined by experience, cultural traditions, and spiritually-rooted connection. This resistance suggests a transnational understanding of their place on the continent and in the world. For the Anishinaabe according to Vizenor, homeland is found at the crossroads of redefining and Indigenizing understandings of colonial versions of tribalism and nationalism. At the very least, Indigenous transnationalisms challenge definitions and realities of the nation-state and its colonial reach. As such, Vizenor’s Minneapolis poems suggest alternative modes of mapping Indigenous experience. Whether it’s Clement Vizenor’s bringing White Earth stories to the suburbs, an Anishinaabe veteran advancing subversive political moves, or an Anishinaabe mother honoring and calling upon her inheritance of powerful resisters, each narrative embodied in the poems shapes the integrity of Anishinaabe storytelling and historiography, a communally shared contract that originates from the center, the “heart,” and moves outward to all Anishinaabeg, no matter where they reside. When understood from the heart—or “by my heart” as Vizenor presents it in *Bear Island*—Anishinaabe nationhood and historiography construct cartographic guides through storied geographical locations rather than linear timelines or colonial boundaries. In his poems, then, Vizenor creates an Indigenous cartography to understand Anishinaabe territoriality—one that undoes the natural order of conquest.

If we understand these two moments in Anishinaabe history (a military victory at Bear Island and post-relocation recuperation of Minneapolis as Anishinaabe territory), we see transnational politics at work at the same time Indigenous peoples are asserting national sovereignty. Considering the framework of “by my heart” throughout Vizenor’s poetry allows for the mapping of Anishinaabe experience as perpetually adaptable as it is

rooted in its specific epistemological belief systems and spiritual practices. As creative documents of Anishinaabe testimony, *Bear Island* and *Almost Ashore* are key sites of political struggle for Anishinaabe peoples; in this way, Vizenor’s literature makes transparent the colonial tendency to obfuscate conquest and naturalize ownership of “the nation.”

Notes

¹ In his email, Burgess continued to write: *...But I understand too that I'm just one person who is of mixed Nakota/Anishinaabe heritage. What I think about also is the connection to place. I have walked/ran the edge of the Mississippi river so many times that I feel a connection to the river. On those runs I'd often make offerings to the river and say a prayer. I went there to meditate and think about things when I felt lost or discouraged about things. I can still maintain that connection up here in Bemidji because the river runs through the lake. In fact my office looks right out on the lake. I can still make my offerings and have daily interactions with that river. That to me is how you build nationhood by relating to a particular place.*

There are also thoughts people have about the city ruining or destroying the sacredness of place. I have some thoughts on that subject as well... One of the main things would be that if we think of Earth as our Mother than all parts of Earth are parts of our mother. When we are born as humans sometimes our human mother is permanently scarred and that is symbolic of the sacrifice that our mother's make so that we might live. We also leave scars on our Earth Mother and that is hard to deal with because sometimes it is because we make bad or wrong choices. This makes me think of the creation story with the hero twins arguing inside their mother's belly over who gets to be born first. In their arguing they kill their mother. But I truly believe that our Earth Mother still loves us and that we should continue to honor all the places throughout her body even when we have made poor choices and have scarred her. If this means making an offering to the Mississippi in the middle of all the pollution that the city inflicts on that river, then so be it. I'll still do it.

² According to The Minneapolis American Indian Center’s website, Minneapolis is home to perhaps 7,500 or more Ojibwe people. There are over 35,000 American Indian people in the broader Minneapolis metro area.

³ Mii gwech to the reader of an earlier draft of this paper for his/her extremely helpful advice about the practice of *nametwaawaa* and its relationship to “by my heart.”

⁴ The 8th Rez is a term of which Ben Burgess made me aware. Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, White Earth, Red Lake, Net Lake, Mille Lacs are the official seven Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota. He shared this mnemonic device to help me remember: “**Fat Geese Like Wild Rice Near Marshes.**”

⁵ In my book *Creative Alliances: The Transnational Designs of Indigenous Women’s Poetry*, published by University of Oklahoma Press in 2014, I create and employ the term *dislocation* as a key term that encompasses the many types of displacements

contemporary Native people experience from “non-recognition, disenrollment, diaspora and migration, destabilized citizenship, intertribalism, queer identity, and, more broadly, transnational experiences” (4).

⁶ Sociologist Barry Hindess, in his essay “Citizenship and Empire,” points out the “glaring asymmetry” of globalization, the contemporary global order. He asserts that empire is the “emerging form of sovereignty” and that empire “does not rely on territorial boundaries”; however, “there is a radical discontinuity between our present condition and the earlier world order” (241), which, he argues, grows out of the standard of civilization that emerged from the Treaty of Westphalia. While Hindess is not specifically alluding to contemporary Native American experience, his model of how the organizing principle of imperial rule was and is a civilizing mission remains helpful in the framework for this paper.

⁷ Though Warhus explores the “traditional” notion of Native American mapping, the trajectory of that notion is still viable today, I believe, in the way Native peoples creatively engage the imaginative means of writing as a continued version of recording oral documents.

⁸ There is some controversy around Hole in the Day’s leadership and death. See Anton Treuer’s history *The Assassination of Hole in the Day* for more.

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